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# THE INDYPENDENT

a FREE paper for free people • Issue #70, May 25 – June 14, 2005

## Riding Out the Storm

Critical Mass perseveres through  
9 months of police harassment.

Chris Anderson reports, **PAGES 6–7**



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### WHAT IS INDYMEDIA?

With autonomous chapters in more than 120 cities throughout the world, the Independent Media Center is an international network of volunteer media activists.

The IMC seeks to create a new media ethic by providing progressive, in-depth and accurate coverage of issues. We are a community-based organization using media to facilitate political and cultural self-representation. We seek to analyze issues affecting individuals, communities and ecosystems by providing media tools and space to those seeking to communicate. We espouse open dialogue and placing the means of communication and creativity back in the hands of the people, away from the drive of profit.

*The Independent* is funded by benefits, subscriptions, donations, grants and ads from organizations and individuals with similar missions.

### WHAT CAN I DO TO GET INVOLVED?

The IMC has an open door. You can write for *The Independent*, film events and rallies, self-publish articles to the web, take photos or just help us run the office. As an organization relying on volunteer support, we encourage all forms of participation.

The print team reserves the right to edit articles for length, content and clarity. We welcome your participation in the entire editorial process.

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**COVER PHOTO  
BY ANTRIM CASKEY**

# Residential Hotel Turns Hostel on Tenants

BY BENNETT BAUMER

Convicted slumlord Jay Wartski has made a career of dodging court orders, harassing tenants and illegally converting single-room occupancy residential hotels (SROs) into regular hotels. Wartski cut his teeth by illegally evicting SRO tenants at the Sahara and Bond hotels by using junkies, drug dealers, hookers, and even dogs to harass folks. H. Wartski ended up spending a month in Rikers Island for his antics.

These days, he's the owner of the Dexter House on West 86th Street on the Upper West Side, and employing the same tactics of illegal SRO conversions past. Brazilian immigrant Manuel Guerrero has been living at the Dexter House for five years, but management claims he is an illegal subtenant and is attempting to evict him. Management has also tried to oust opera singer Lisa Beth MacKinlay, though she was able to stay by fighting in court.

Outside MacKinlay's room, a plywood-floored hallway leads into a shared bathroom and water damage from past rains is visible. Other floors have much better infrastructure, but usually these contain tourist rooms.

Tenants are fighting back, and have gotten the support of elected leaders like City Councilmember Gale Brewer and Congressman Jerry Nadler, both of whom have spoken at rallies with tenants. The Dexter House

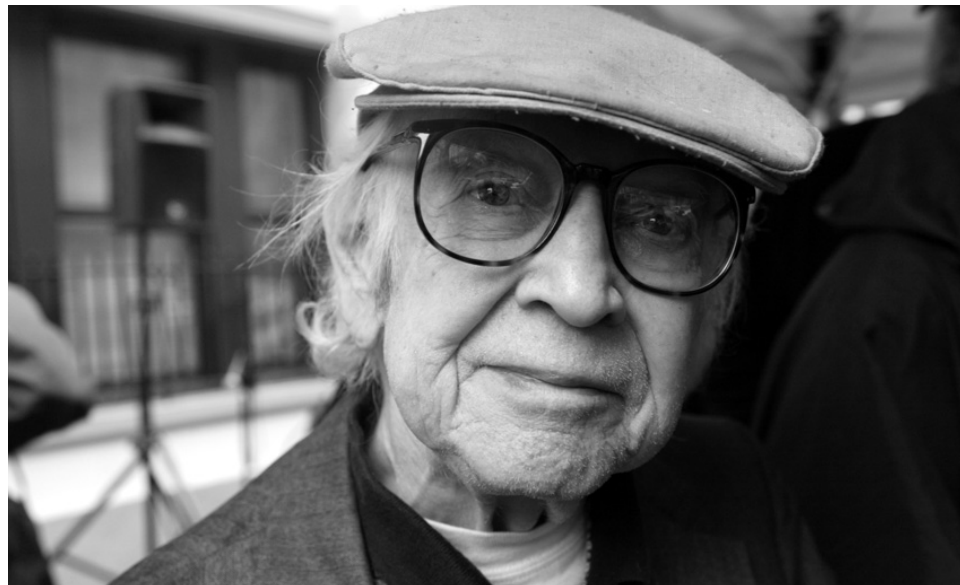
Tenant Association is hoping to use the politicians to push the city Department of Housing Preservation and Development to take action against the hotel's management.

Calling Wartski "fair," building manager Robert Goicochea said, "He doesn't push people around." If tenants say he has, then, "let them come forward." "It's not like I'm converting this place into a hostel," Goicochea added.

That's exactly what he's doing, tenants say, and the building is advertised as a hostel on several Web sites and in the phone book. Paying as little as \$30 a night, tourists from around the world are packed into six-bed hostel rooms. This maneuvering violates both the city's zoning resolution and the Multiple Dwelling Law, according to Tenant Association president Vicki Labosky. "Rooms cannot be rented for less than a week," she said.

If Wartski's past actions are any indication, he will continue to flout the law, and jail may be no deterrent. "The building used to be residential, now they are catering to the tourist trade. It's impossible to know how long you can be there," said Jack Berger, 88, a resident of Dexter for 25 years.

*Additional reporting by Antrim Caskey. Bennett Baumer is an organizer with Met Council on Housing. This article originally appeared in Tenant/Inquilino newspaper.*



**IT'S HOME:** Jack Berger, 88, has lived at Dexter House for 25 years.

## SRO DISAPPEARANCE CONTINUES

The situation at Dexter House is typical of what's been happening at the city's single-room occupancy hotels over the last 50 years. Once a widespread, cheap, and easily obtainable source of housing, their numbers have declined dramatically, as landlords find it more profitable to rent rooms to tourists, students, or homeless people whose rent is paid by the city.

"We used to have a list of SROs, but we don't give it out any more," says Terry Poe of the West Side SRO Law Project. "Outside of rooming houses, they're not renting to permanent tenants."

The number of SRO rooms in the city has fallen from 200,000 in the late 1950s to less than 40,000 today, according to Poe. Most of that decline came in the 1970s and 1980s – not coincidentally, the era when homelessness emerged as a major problem – but it continues today.

"In the last seven or eight years, there's been a tremendous loss of rooming houses in Harlem," Poe says. In 1986, he continues, there were 32 on one two-block stretch of West 121st Street; last year, there was one. The group is also seeing signs of SRO and rooming-house conversion in Brooklyn and the Rockaways.

The city Rent Guidelines Board has been more sympathetic to SRO tenants than to regular tenants over the past few years, freezing their rents in 2002 and 2004. This is partially because many SRO tenants would become homeless if they lost their rooms, and part because their landlords are a small and often corrupt sector of the real-estate business.

"They're all known as bottom-feeders," says Poe. Also, he adds, SRO landlords rarely show up to testify at RGB hearings, while SRO tenants do.

—STEVEN WISHNIA

# Pot Gains in Albany

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

A bill to legalize medical marijuana in New York State took a major step forward this month, when it finally gained a Republican sponsor in the state Senate.

Sen. Vincent Leibell (R-Brewster) announced on May 10 that he would introduce the legislation. Assemblymember Richard Gottfried (D-Manhattan) is sponsoring its counterpart.

The bill would "provide the strictest controls of any medical-marijuana statute in the nation," says Bob Farley, Leibell's counsel. Under it, patients with "life-threatening conditions" – cancer, AIDS, or multiple sclerosis, but not glaucoma or migraines – could get up to 5 grams a day of cannabis if their doctor certified it would be the best medicine for them. The state Department of Health would license "agricultural producers" to grow the herb, in secure state-owned or state-leased premises, and patients would get it from either state or local government clinics or licensed non-profits. They could obtain up to 17 days' supply at one time.

Other states with medical-marijuana laws allow people with less serious illnesses to use pot, but the New York State Medical Society, which has endorsed the bill, insisted on the narrower grounds, according to Farley and Vincent Marrone of New Yorkers for

Compassionate Use, the main activist organization behind the bill.

Supporters say the bill has a good chance of passing both houses this year. Governor George Pataki is officially undecided, but could very well veto it. (Pataki's press office referred questions to the Department of Health, which did not return phone calls.)

If the bill did become law, it would be merely symbolic unless the state can find a way around federal law, which bans all cannabis cultivation and declares there is no such thing as medical use. The Supreme Court ruled in 2001 that "medical necessity" was not a valid reason to break the laws against distributing pot.

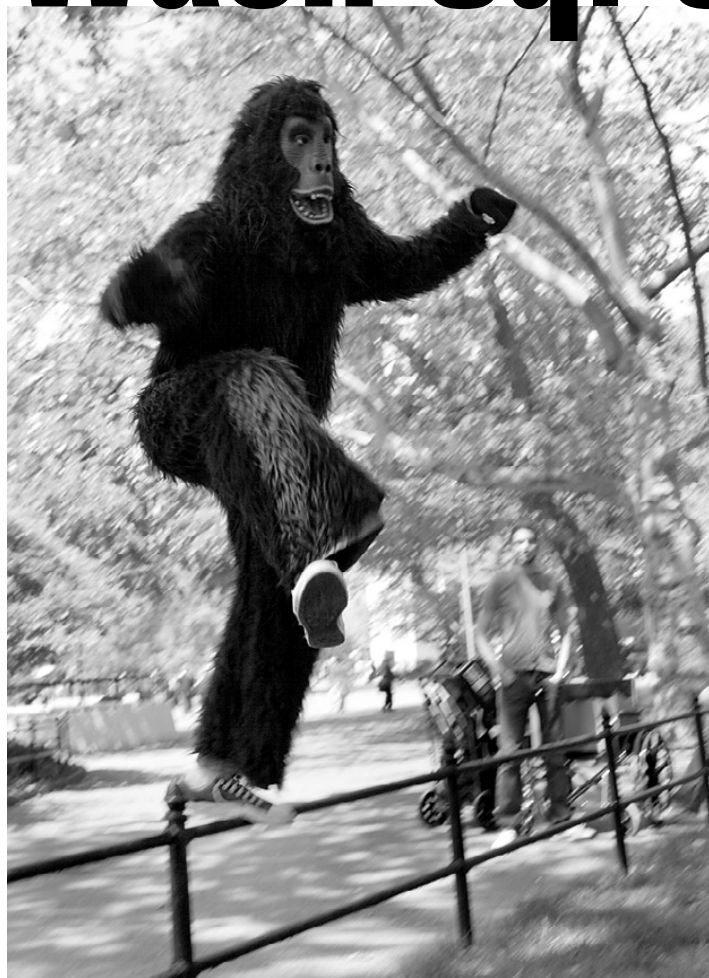
Having the state license medical-marijuana growers "gives the federal government a target," says Marrone, "but it's the only way the Senate would pass the bill."

"We think this is legal under federal law," says Farley. The herb would be grown under state auspices, and, he contends, "the federal government usually defers to the states" on questions of medicine. The Bush administration has made prosecuting medical-cannabis growers a top priority, he was told. It's possible that Alberto Gonzalez becoming attorney general might change that, he responds.

Paul Armentano of the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws doesn't know Gonzalez's position, but says it would be "hard to get much worse than John Ashcroft."

Greenwich Village battles Parks Dept. over future of fabled green space. Councilmember vows to block funds “if our needs are not met.”

# Wash Sq. Showdown



Joshua Solomon plays the gorilla in Shlomo Weprin's film, "Banana Split." PHOTO: ANTRIM CASKEY

BY AARON LEVINE

A plan by the city's Department of Parks and Recreation to redesign Washington Square Park has passed a series of hurdles recently, but continues to draw heavy opposition from the Greenwich Village community – from Councilmember Alan Gerson to the “mound people,” who are trying to save the park's cracked asphalt mounds.

In the plan, which was approved by the city Landmarks Commission on May 17 and by Community Board 2 in April, the park's sunken fountain would be moved 23 feet, the performance space in the southeast would be replaced by a lawn, two dog runs would be moved and enlarged, three asphalt mounds would be flattened, and a fence of granite and wrought iron would encircle the perimeter of the iconic park. The renovations are expected to take from two to three years.

The \$16 million project is set to begin in the fall, and Gerson speculates that the final plan should be ready in a few weeks – including allocation of initial funding, plan design changes and a timeline for the project. But he warns that he will get city funding withheld if his constituents' demands are not met.

“I've communicated to the Parks Department that if our needs are not satisfied, there will be no public funds for the park,” Gerson says.

The changes he envisions are having either no fence or a low fence; adding more space for preteen kids; preserving the central space for hanging out and impromptu performing; improving the dog runs, chess-table area and walkways; and, finally, preserving the park as a public space.

The 9.75-acre park has long been a center of dissent as well as a place of refuge and relaxation for many who live in the Village, and a place to hang out for the thousands of people who visit the neighborhood every day. But many fear that if the renovation is carried out, construction sites, the fence and the impact of private funding may disrupt the 179-year-old park's openness forever.

## DON'T FENCE US IN

“This is the transformation of Washington Square Park into either an endless construction zone or a semiprivatized viewing garden,” said Jonathan Greenburg, a leader of the opposition to the plan. “When you create a reliance on additional funding, you are making a new class of donors to account for that money, and they may form a conservancy – such as in the case of Central Park – and institute changes to the park's use. We are trying to keep this a public park.”

Greenburg and others have formed an increasingly influential coalition against the proposed changes called the Open Washington Square Park Coalition ([openwsp.com](http://openwsp.com)). Most recently, they lobbied successfully against the installation of a wrought-iron gate that would lock the park at night. But Greenburg suggests that the fence around

the park is a more important issue than the gates.

Chief project designer George Vellonikas suggests that the fence will not affect the neighborhood or even draw much attention. “The fence will be 3 feet 10 inches. I don't think it will have an impact on the surrounding area at all,” he says. But he admits that a concrete foundation on the sidewalk side of the fence will increase its height to 4 feet 4 inches.

Greenburg argues that the fence will block off the park from those who use it, that increasing green space will limit the public's ability to hold large gatherings and demonstrations, and that private funding will lead to private control.

The group also says that the Parks Department and several members of Community Board 2 have alienated members of the local community by designing changes to the park in secret and without community approval.

“The plan itself is pretty far along,” says Greenburg. “But it was only there for public viewing for three months. The plan has been worked on in secret for two years.”

Aubrey Lees, who will step down as chair of Community Board 2 in June, says that although an outline of the plan had been around for several years, she did not see the plans until December, when funding became available. She feels the community has had ample time to offer its input. “It was a Parks Department plan that had community input a teeny bit, but when the community saw it then there were changes made to the plan,” Lees says.

Another issue is the fate of the “teen plaza,” the public stage in the southeast part of the park. The renovation would demolish it, and performers would need a permit to use a temporary stage that would be assembled for each use. That would mean impromptu performances would be cut drastically, says CB2 member Doris Diether. “If they have to bring in the stage every time, it will cut down on the public's ability to use it for little concerts,” she explains. “They didn't say that was the plan, but there is a sneaking suspicion.”

## FOLLOW THE GREEN

Currently, the city has allocated \$1.5 million for the project's first phase, with another half million on the way. As public funds will cover less than half of the renovation's \$16 million budget, the city is seeking private donations – money that may come with strings attached – from wealthy institutions such as New York University. So far, NYU has donated \$1 million. Vellonikas does not feel that the private money will influence any programming initiatives or any other changes to the design of the park. In fact, he is disappointed with the donation. “I wish NYU would have given more than \$1 million. It's not enough for such a large job,” he says.

Still, the dynamic of the park may change as the donations come in and the renovations begin. “They were thinking that there would be another conservancy like the one in Central Park,” Diether says. “Washington Square Park has always been a public park, but if they were to bring in a conservancy, it wouldn't be that way anymore.”

Sick, of the Austin-based Asylum Street Spankers, and his friend Sarah, a self-described local legend, enjoy a carefree afternoon in Washington Square Park. PHOTO: ANTRIM CASKEY



## THE FOLK SONG RIOT OF 1961

Washington Square Park has been a place for musicians since at least the 1940s. By 1961, it was the center of the city's folk-music scene, and Parks Commissioner Newbold Morris ordered the police to crack down on “the roving troubadours and their followers.” The musicians defied the ban, and on April 9, police invaded the park to clear them out. The result was what became known as the “Folk Song Riot.” One group sat down in the empty fountain and sang “We Shall Not Be Moved.” The cops attacked them with billy clubs. “5,000 BEATNIKS RIOT IN VILLAGE,” the tabloid *Mirror* headlined.

One of the demonstrators may have been 19-year-old Bob Dylan, who two days later opened for John Lee Hooker at Gerde's Folk City, down the block on West Fourth Street. The city eventually relented after more musical protests, including a sing-in by 1,500 people in a nearby vacant lot.

—Steven Wishnia

## MEDIA: GO WHERE THE PEOPLE ARE

At the 2nd National Conference on Media Reform, the argument was simple: Every progressive organization should make national media reform its “second issue,” because the success of other liberal and leftist efforts depends on democratizing an increasingly corporatized and commercialized media.

This argument was a powerful one, and it helped energize the thousands of people who participated in the St. Louis conference. Yet there are many progressive groups who shouldn’t make federal media reform their first issue or their second issue – or maybe not even their third or fourth issue. Ironically, those groups include grass-roots media activists and local social-justice organizations.

This isn’t to say that this burgeoning “independent, grass-roots media movement” should oppose national media-reform efforts. Indeed, they should support them as best they can. But should they devote a lot of organizational time and energy to them? No.

Grass-roots media groups are, more often than not, extraordinarily fragile creatures – short on time and money, running largely on the fumes produced by political passion. To argue that these groups must do more on a federal-policy level is to misunderstand both their ideals and the areas where they can be most effective.

Instead of worrying too much about the ins and outs of federal regulatory bodies, grass-roots media groups should spend more time reaching out to their own constituencies. Local community organizations, especially those addressing issues of race and poverty, are woefully underrepresented in the independent media universe. The way to win these groups over to the cause is not to turn our eyes to Capitol Hill; it is to go where the people are, to facilitate the narratives of the dispossessed. This kind of work isn’t easy, but it is vitally important.

Media reformers and groups focusing on issues of “media justice” should work together when they can, and should always remember that they are allies in a long struggle. But they should also remember that they are in many ways quite different animals. This isn’t reason for despair; it’s reason for hope.

*An earlier version of this article appeared in the St. Louis Confluence.*

—CHRIS ANDERSON

### A Sampling of NYC-Based Media Groups

#### PAPER TIGER TELEVISION

[papertiger.org](http://papertiger.org)

Non-profit, volunteer video collective.

#### FAIRNESS AND ACCURACY IN REPORTING

[fair.org](http://fair.org)

Advocates greater press diversity, scrutinizes media practices that marginalize public interest & alternative viewpoints.

#### CENTER FOR INTERNATIONAL MEDIA ACTION

[mediaactioncenter.org](http://mediaactioncenter.org)

Non-profit created to strengthen connections among grass-roots organizers, public-interest advocates, activists and researchers.

#### DOWNTOWN COMMUNITY TELEVISION CENTER

[dctvny.org](http://dctvny.org)

Expands grass-roots public access, particularly for members of low-income and minority communities.

# 2,200 Call for Media Upheaval

BY STEVEN WISHNIA

ST. LOUIS—On April 6, 1846, Dred Scott, a slim, mustachioed slave in his mid-forties, walked into the courthouse here and filed a lawsuit demanding freedom for himself and his wife, Harriet. In 1857, the U.S. Supreme Court denied his appeal, holding that slaveholders had the right to traffic in members of the African race, “like an ordinary article of merchandise and property.”

On the weekend of May 13-15 this year, 2,200 people packed a hotel conference room two blocks south of the old St. Louis courthouse for the National Conference for Media Reform. Organized by Free Press, the event was dedicated to the proposition that news is too important to a democracy for the media to be trafficked like an ordinary article of merchandise and property.

The press is “the weak slat of democracy,” said Janine Jackson of Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, quoting A.J. Liebling during the opening plenary session. “Bad media hurts real people. Black and brown kids go to jail because of what someone read in the media about ‘superpredators.’” Later that day, Naomi Klein paraphrased Upton Sinclair to speak of an “invisible concrete wall” that blocks out important issues and “makes it OK to be ignorant.” The media “amplification machine,” she added, decides which stories are worthy of outrage; it decreed that the torture at Abu Ghraib was a “fraternity prank” – and it “got a lot of help from the Kerry campaign.”

#### DEMOCRATIC PRESS?

Criticism of the mainstream press for being more plutocratic than democratic is not a new thing, but the current media-reform movement dates mainly from the mid-’90s, when the number of corporations dominating the media dropped to single digits, the Telecommunications Act of 1996 ended the 40-station limit on radio-chain ownership – enabling Clear Channel to amass more than 1,200 stations – and the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) crushed the fledgling pirate-radio movement. By 2003, when the Bush FCC tried to ease the limits on TV-station ownership, a wave of protest from both left and right stopped it – but Congress sneaked a partial increase into another bill.

Free Press itself was founded by two Midwesterners, media critic Robert McChesney and *The Nation* writer John Nichols. The 2,200 people who came to St. Louis was more than double the number that turned out for its first conference, in 2003. The attendees ranged from anarchists to Democrats, teenagers to octogenarians, hippie-ish women in long skirts and sneakers to suited policy wonks. They came from all 50 states



At the Indymedia caucus, a voice is heard for grass-roots outlets.

PHOTO: ST.LOUISINDYMEDIA.ORG

and several countries, with the Midwest most prominently represented. This was a crowd where people clamored to get their picture taken with George Lakoff, where Amy Goodman, Naomi Klein, and Bill Moyers drew whoops and ovations upon taking the stage. Dozens of groups and publications – the Alliance for Community Media, the Campaign for Commercial-Free Childhood, Independent World Television, Chicago Media Action – tabled in another room.

Working-class people were less in evidence; the hotel rooms cost \$82.70 a night. And though the conference was more multiracial than it seemed during the opening plenary, which resembled a reggae show in Vermont – the black women on stage almost outnumbering those in the audience – it was still predominantly white.

#### BAD MEDIA, BIG MOTIVATOR

People’s biggest motivation for coming seemed to be the sense that the corporate media prevent information on crucial issues from getting out to the public. “We have to have a free press to have a democracy,” said Anita Staengl, a “raving radical and very angry citizen,” Democratic activist, and “child of the ’60s” from Alachua, Florida. “People need to hear the truth to protect our rights against corporations and hold our government accountable for the horrible war crimes they’re committing.”

“I always knew the media was screwed up,” said LaWanda Newley, 51, a peace activist from Huntsville, Alabama, but she was particularly irked last month, when her group put on a benefit to raise relief funds for Iraqi civilians and the families of American soldiers. “We called all the media in Huntsville, and we got no coverage whatsoever.” Warren Popp, a 21-year-old student at St. Louis Community College, worked for Rep. Dennis Kucinich in last year’s presidential campaign, a “constant uphill battle” after the media decided that Kucinich was not a serious candidate.

“We need to create a countervailing force to the homogenization of both art and what passes for news,” said John Connolly, head of the American Federation of Television and Radio Artists. Another labor leader, Nestor

Soto of the Puerto Rican journalists’ union UPAGRA, said that when Univision took over Puerto Rican TV in 2001, it cancelled all but two of 50 locally produced programs.

#### SCHISM OVER REFORM?

Identifying the problems with corporate-dominated media is one thing. What to do about them is another, and the conference saw some tension between “reform the media” liberals and “be the media” radicals. The “reform” side concentrates on government-policy issues, such as the FCC’s ownership regulations, aborting the far-right takeover of PBS, and the forthcoming revision of the Telecommunications Act. The “be” side, seeing no hope for the corporate media, follows Liebling’s dictum that “freedom of the press is guaranteed only to those who own one” and would rather build Indymedia-style grass-roots outlets.

“The intersections between these two impulses are more important than anything that’s happened at this conference,” said Maggie Ellinger-Locke, 22, an ecofeminist and occasional St. Louis Indymedia activist.

A third element of the movement is activists calling for “media justice,” for getting poor, Black and Latino people a voice in the press. Without racial justice in society as a whole, San Francisco-area youth organizer Malkia Cyril told the conference, there never can be a “free press.”

One group, affiliated with the liberal government-reform group Common Cause and Danny Schechter, has concocted a “media Bill of Rights,” stating that media should provide an uninhibited marketplace of ideas, use the public’s airwaves to serve the public’s interest, and reflect and respond to local communities.

Juan Gonzalez of *Democracy Now!* suggested four pillars for the movement: public accountability, media workers, independent media and non-monopoly commercial media. But he warned, “Don’t get too optimistic. Capitalism is very resilient.”

Robert McChesney was more upbeat. “Organizing around this issue is not hard,” he told the crowd. “It’s like throwing a seed on ten-foot-deep Iowa topsoil. People respond to it.”

# Sugar Daddies

HOW THE SNACK FOOD INDUSTRY FUNNELS CONTRIBUTIONS TO HEALTH GROUPS

BY RUSSELL MOKHIBER  
AND ROBERT WEISSMAN

If you're wondering why Americans are losing the wars on cancer, heart disease and diabetes, you might look at the funding sources of the major public health groups.

Earlier this month, the American Diabetes Association (ADA) cut a deal with candy and soda-pop maker Cadbury Schweppes. Here's the deal: Cadbury Schweppes kicks in a couple million dollars to the ADA. In return, the company gets to use the ADA label on its diet drinks, plus the positive publicity generated by the deal.

Just this week, *The Journal of Pediatrics* published a study placing a good part of the blame for childhood diabetes on soda pop and sugared drinks. The Cadbury/ADA deal came under immediate fire from Gary Ruskin at the Portland-based group Commercial Alert. Ruskin wants the ADA to return what he considers to be a "corrupt contribution" from Cadbury Schweppes.

"Maybe the American Diabetes Association should rename itself the American Junk Food Association," Ruskin said. "If Cadbury Schweppes really wanted to reduce the incidence of obesity and diabetes, it would stop advertising its high-sugar products, and remove them from our nation's schools."

We called Richard Kahn, the ADA's chief medical and scientific officer, to ask about this. (The entire transcript of the interview is posted at [www.corporatecrimereporter.com](http://www.corporatecrimereporter.com)).

On the whole, Kahn sounded like an industry apologist, rather than a public health official. He said the type 2 diabetes

problem in the United States is being driven by obesity, and weight is simply a function of the calories in and calories out. It doesn't matter whether the calories are sugar, protein or carbohydrates.

Kahn said that there was no evidence that sugar or sugared sodas were driving the obesity problem. (The interview was conducted just before *The Journal of Pediatrics* released its findings, but according to the Center for Science in the Public Interest, several previous studies have linked drinking sodas to weight gain.)

We asked Kahn whether he thought it was appropriate to restrict access to junk food. He replied that restricting access to junk food wouldn't work.

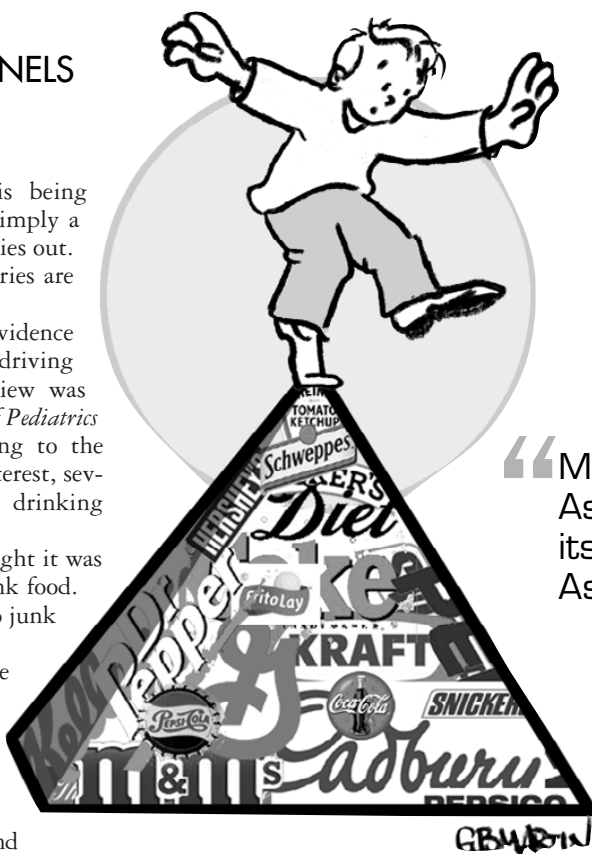
Then we asked him why then the ADA was supporting legislation introduced by Senator Edward Kennedy (D-Massachusetts) that would restrict access to junk food via vending machines to school children.

"Because there is little to be lost and potentially some to be gained by limiting the foods sold in vending machines," Kahn said.

He defended taking money from Cadbury saying that Cadbury was only allowed to use the ADA label on its diet drinks, and that the money would be used for educational programs to encourage people to exercise.

But it's not just Cadbury Schweppes. The ADA takes big money from a wide range of drug and food companies, among them Kraft Foods, J.M. Smucker Company, General Mills, Inc. and H.J. Heinz Company.

Of course, the ADA is not alone. Dr. Matt Hahn, who runs a community health center in



Hahn told us he wouldn't, since his patients can get cereals without trans fats.

The AHA says that it agrees with Hahn that people should limit their intake of trans fats, but says that it certified Kellogg's Smart Start because it meets the AHA guidelines, including containing less than three grams of fat per serving.

“Maybe the American Diabetes Association should rename itself the American Junk Food Association.”

"When it comes to Kellogg's Smart Start cereal, the nutritional label states that it contains zero grams of trans fat, which means that it contains less than 0.5 grams of trans fat," said AHA's Carrie Thacker.

Thacker says that Kellogg's gives no money to the AHA, although we later learned from the Center for Science in the Public Interest that the AHA charges companies \$7,500 per certified product, and \$4,500 per year thereafter – plus additional fees. And like the ADA, the AHA and other health groups like the American Cancer Society get big money donations from a long list of drug and food companies.

*Russell Mokhiber is editor of the Corporate Crime Reporter. Robert Weissman is editor of the Multinational Monitor. Mokhiber and Weissman are co-authors of On the Rampage: Corporate Predators and the Destruction of Democracy.*

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## Still We Ride

*Still We Ride*, a gripping new documentary by Andrew Lynn, Elizabeth Press, and Christopher J. Ryan, chronicles the NYPD crackdown on Critical Mass that began in August 2004. While the story is well known to the movie's core audience, *Still We Ride* succeeds in adding dramatic visuals to a storyline that has mostly become a depressing litany of monthly arrest statistics.

One of the most gripping characters in the film is Paulette Giguere, who began the evening of the August 2004 Critical Mass ride celebrating her 50th birthday with a new bike and ended it locked up on Pier 57 and plastered across the front page of the *New York Daily News*. Paulette Giguere is so far from the picture of the usual hippie or punk activist that she gives lie to the NYPD portrayal of the ride. The filmmakers caught police officers on tape claiming that the Critical Mass was "infiltrated by the ACLU and other groups" and that it "has become an anarchist group."

The power of the video image is both the greatest strength and weakness of *Still We Ride*. Over the course of the film, viewers come face to face with police brutality (including a dramatic standoff in front of St. Marks Church on 2nd Ave.), and an assortment of joyful bikers and colorful characters. After watching *Still We Ride*, it becomes clear just how pervasive the video camera has become at political protests. To some degree, the pictures determine the direction of the story. It would have been informative to see more about the early days of Critical Mass before it became so controversial.

These, however, are minor quibbles. "These guys won't stop cars," smirks one NYPD patrolman observing a Critical Mass ride. Probably true, but the highly entertaining *Still We Ride* may help stop the NYPD's attack on a peaceful ride.

—CHRIS ANDERSON

[www.stillweridethemovie.com](http://www.stillweridethemovie.com)



last Friday of each month in over 300 cities around the world. The Manhattan ride begins at 7 p.m. on the north side of Union Square Park. Chris Carlsson, one of the founders of Critical Mass, describes the early days of the ride as "exuberant, surprising, erotic, fun and utterly transformative."

"No one knew what to expect," Carlsson adds, "and no one anticipated just how amazing and fun and open-ended it would be."

"Critical Mass," Ryan Kuonen states flatly, "is the most exciting thing I've ever done. It's a carnival on wheels, and I love it."

Some participants laud the ride's transformative effect. "For a lot of the new people who join the ride, Critical Mass is fun," says Bill DiPaola, a volunteer with the environmental group Time's Up! ([times-up.org](http://times-up.org)) which helps promote Critical Mass in New York. "When people come on the ride though, they get a sense of freedom that they've never gotten before. They realize that you can ride a bike in New York safely. By the time folks get off their bike they start think about riding it to work, using it more and fighting to get changes in the infrastructure of the city that will make riding a bike in New York a safer experience."

DiPaola is convinced that the growth in the popularity of bicycling in New York City has occurred despite the city, rather than because of it. "Manhattan is a flat city, and riding a bike here makes a lot of sense," he says. "The problem is that riding a bike here is also incredibly dangerous. Critical Mass is one of the things people can do in New York that both lets them ride a bike safely and also makes a statement about where we think the city's priorities should be."

By early 2003, after five years of Critical Mass, rides were drawing several hundred participants. While police on scooters would often accompany the ride, it was largely accepted and even ignored by city officials. The popularity of the ride grew tremendously throughout the summer of 2003, thanks in large part to a well-publicized "Bike Month" that ended with a Critical Mass attended by over a thousand bikers. That October, more than 2,000 cyclists thronged the streets for a Halloween night ride.

More than 2,000 bicyclists also turned out for the July 30 ride that took over both the West Side Highway and FDR Drive. "That night," wrote Dave Bonan on the [nyc.indymedia.org](http://nyc.indymedia.org) web site, "the cars were driving on our road."

### WARNING SIGNS

However, the July ride witnessed the first signs of more stringent policing. "In July it started to feel like the police were practicing for the RNC," says Ryan Kuonen. Scooter cops zoomed to the head of the ride, blocking cars on ramps from entering the highways dominated by bicyclists. Meanwhile, unmarked police cars tailed the ride, threatening to arrest cyclists who were similarly "corking" traffic.

During the Aug. 27 pre-RNC ride, 264 bicyclists were arrested; the arrests have continued ever since.

Following the aggressive police response, Bicycling advocates turned to a legal strategy to secure the ride. On Oct. 19, five bicyclists filed suit against the NYPD alleging that the police illegally seized locked bikes during the September Critical Mass ride. In response, the city counter-sued, asking a U.S. District Court on Oct. 26 to permanently enjoin any-

one from riding in Critical Mass without an official permit. Although the suit was tossed in late December, the city refiled it in mid-March. This time the city not only sought to block the ride but also to enjoin DiPaola and four other Time's Up! volunteers from personally promoting or even talking about the ride.

"The city's argument is very troubling," noted veteran civil rights attorney Norman Siegel. "It's a prior restraint and a violation of

forming, of people on tall bikes, on artistic bikes. That's for sure. But we also feel that the bike has survived the winter in the face of massive police intimidation and corruption."

### SELECTIVE ENFORCEMENT

With attention focused on the Critical Mass battles in Manhattan, the NYPD's selective enforcement policies have been largely overlooked.

The same city administration that sued



Photographer Sari Goodfriend glides by the NYPD during the RNC Critical Mass.

PHOTO: ANTRIM CASKEY

the First Amendment. It's clearly unconstitutional. If the city prevails, social justice activists could not publicize the gathering of people to engage in any form of civil disobedience."

Outside the courtroom, activists have fought back in other ways, filing a Freedom of Information Act request to find out exactly how much the city is spending on policing the ride. Critical Mass riders have responded by launching the ride from multiple points across the city and using text messaging to avoid the police.

Police tactics have been aggressive. According to NYC Indymedia reports, the NYPD has deployed scooter squads, uniformed and plainclothes officers on foot and bikes, orange netting, marked and undercover vans, loudspeakers, command units, video surveillance teams and helicopters in response to Critical Mass. In court testimony related to the lawsuit against the Time's Up! volunteers, Assistant Police Chief Bruce Smolka noted that the NYPD devoted "a large amount of resources, personnel and equipment" to the monthly rides.

Many believe that Critical Mass participation has suffered as a result. "The ridership this spring has been way down," says Kuonen. "Normally by this time of year you're getting rides of 300 or 400. April's ride was barely 150. Maybe it was the weather, but I don't think so. I think the police tactics are working."

DiPaola admits that some of the pageantry and excitement of Critical Mass has been drained by the police. "The city has stripped the ride of families, of color, of people per-

Although most riders acknowledge that there are often as many police (one to two dozen) as people on the Brooklyn rides, there have yet to be any arrests at the outer borough event, which occurs on the second Friday of every month, beginning at Grand Army Plaza.

"The police there seem really intent on getting us to agree to certain guidelines ahead of time," says Kuonen. "But once the ride starts, even though they follow us, they've never actually arrested anybody."

### LOOKING AHEAD

With the future of Critical Mass in New York City hanging in the balance, participants are debating how to save the ride.

Bicycling activists are hopeful that the political winds are shifting. "Politicians are starting to come out in support of Critical Mass, community boards are voting to support us," says DiPaola. "We feel like the only people in this city who don't support Critical Mass are the mayor and the NYPD."

"Time's Up! will never ask the city for a permit for Critical Mass because it's not our ride," he adds. "We don't sponsor it, no matter what the city claims, and we couldn't ask for a permit even if we wanted one."

Many riders have begun launching Critical Mass from multiple points around Manhattan, a tactic recommended by Chris Carlsson, a veteran of San Francisco Critical Mass's struggle to stay on the streets in the mid-1990's. "Remember," said Carlsson, "it's not illegal to ride your bike, so we can always fall back on that."

Other riders have taken the opposite approach, urging participants to obey traffic laws. "What if we didn't blow stoplights?" asks Critical Mass participant James Bachhuber.

For her part, Kuonen sees promise in the Brooklyn Critical Mass. She's actively working to increase knowledge of and participation in the event, and hopes that it can remain mostly trouble free.

"I think that if George Bush had never come to the city we would never have had this problem," she said. "The police told us we couldn't ride, and we did anyway, and now it's just a big power play. But no matter what happens," she added, "we have to get Critical Mass back to what it's supposed to be: fun."

(Matt Wasserman and A.K. Gupta contributed to this report.)

The Manhattan Critical Mass will be held on May 27 and June 24. The next Brooklyn Critical Mass will be June 10.



NYPD'S FINEST: Assistant Police Chief Bruce H. Smolka, Jr. arrests Lisa Kozlowski on April 29, 2005. PHOTO: ANTRIM CASKEY

Assistant Chief Bruce H. Smolka, Jr., head of the NYPD's Manhattan South borough command, has become the public face of police repression at Critical Mass bike rides. Here's his rap sheet.

February 1999: Smolka is head of the Street Crimes Unit that pumped 19 bullets into unarmed African immigrant Amadou Diallo. The notorious unit — some members reportedly wore T-shirts proclaiming that "there is no hunting like the hunting of man" — was disbanded in 2002, but Smolka received a promotion.

Feb. 15, 2003: Smolka orders police on horseback

to charge peaceful antiwar demonstrators, after Mayor Bloomberg denied them the right to assemble at the United Nations.

April 7, 2003: Smolka sends 300 riot cops to arrest approximately 100 non-violent protesters in front of the Manhattan headquarters of the Carlyle Group, a military contractor with ties to the Bush and bin Laden families.

May 2003: Smolka kicks a woman in the head while she is participating in 3 days of civil disobedience to protest "special registration" of Muslim immigrants, according to Racial Justice 9-11, which organized the protest.

August-September 2004: Smolka is co-chair of site security for the Republican National Convention. In one week, 1,806 people are arrested, starting with 264 at Critical Mass. Video evidence captured by activists has so far has cleared over 400 arrestees.

December 2004: At a court hearing, Smolka claims that as few as seven bicycles riding together constitute a "procession" and is illegal without a permit. (He says seven cars or trucks are "traffic.") The city's request for an injunction that would prevent Critical Mass from occurring without a permit is denied, but repression continues, with 37 cyclists arrested in March and 34 in April — some grabbed personally by Smolka.

—MATT WASSERMAN

Left: Wonder Woman makes a show at the RNC ride. PHOTO: RoBlock, Houston IMC  
Right: Impounded bicycles from March 2005. PHOTO: fredaskew.com

# Nuclear Myths

BY DONALD PANETH

UNITED NATIONS—The final week of negotiations at the seventh nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) review conference was frantic. Most of the meetings of the conference's three main committees were closed to the public and press. Questions included: Would the conference be able to reach a consensus and write a final document that would preserve the 35-year-old treaty? If it were, what would be in it? And would it be enough to prevent the world from sliding into a nuclear abyss?

It was difficult for correspondents, United Nations Secretariat members, and non-governmental organization experts to determine what was happening behind the closed doors.

Nobody knows what they are doing with regard to the nuclear threat. The United States is losing two wars, in Iraq and Afghanistan. It has Syria and Iran in its sights. Its nuclear policies are based on first use and even use against countries that are not nuclear-armed. It will use nuclear weapons before it loses any more wars.

The conference might be represented diagrammatically by a maze (the NPT) within a labyrinth (diplomatic negotiations) at the center of which was a myth (of power and danger). The diagram would be augmented by an historic chronology.

Man continues to go through cycles of violence, war and peace. Perhaps next time around, a nuclear aggressor will knock the earth off its axis — finis.

Man has been unable to confront the monsters within himself but instead projects them on to others — the enemy, the stranger. Serving the old gods of power and riches and victory, man re-enacts ancient myths of self-destruction.

Nuclear weapons are sacred to those nations that possess them, hence the unwillingness to disarm. They represent ultimate power, and conjure up the mythical underworld in which dwelt the monsters of man's psyche — Cyclops, the Sphinx and Oedipus, the Minotaur. Over and over humanity re-enacts the ancient Greek myths. The monsters triumph.

The Minotaur lurked in the center of his labyrinth, and consumed the young men and women of Athens sent as tribute. Ariadne has perished in the modern world. Theseus wanders in the labyrinth without a thread to lead him out.

Man is lost in the labyrinth of his ambiguous, contradictory, destructive nature.

Man attempts to engage himself, perhaps to redirect himself, but refuses to acknowledge his violent, divided nature. He might educate himself out of his predicament if he recognized it. Governments and nations preferred to torture the question.

The ancient myths remain unresolved.



**COCHABAMBA, BOLIVIA:** Thousands march for nationalized gas. PHOTO: BOLIVIA.INDYMEDIA.ORG

BY FEDERICO FUENTES

Left with no more cards to play, Bolivian President Carlos Mesa succumbed to passing the country's controversial new gas bill on May 17. With Bolivia's poor once again hitting the streets, clamoring for the nationalization of gas, many believe it will be game over for Mesa.

Attempting to stop the passage of the new gas bill through parliament over the past eight months, Mesa earlier threatened to resign three times and to push forward elections by two years. He also called for numerous national meetings between government, business and the social movements. However on May 5, when the house of deputies modified and approved the bill that was passed by the senate in March, it was left on the table for Mesa to sign.

The new law imposes a 32 percent royalty tax on top of an exploration tax of 18 percent. This falls short of the proposed 50 percent for royalties alone that half of Bolivians supported in the June 2004 gas referendum. The house of deputies also watered down an article forcing all current deals onto new contracts in line with some of the new rules, before passing the bill on May 5.

The social movements decided to boycott a national summit with government and business leaders set for May 16, the day before Mesa's deadline to sign the bill. Instead, they initiated two marches, from El Alto and Caracollo near Cochabamba, which have become the two organizing centers for Bolivia's powerful protest movement. Claiming it would be "suicide" to support the bill, Mesa passed it on to the right-wing president of the parliament, Hormando Vaca Diez, to sign, hoping to quell public protest.

## MARCHING ON THE CAPITAL

The latest protest marked a radicalization, adding two further demands to the push for nationalizing the gas — for Mesa to resign and for parliament to be shut down. Chanting "Mesa, traitor, we want your resignation," more than 100,000 residents from El Alto marched down the hill to La Paz on May 16, creating a human snake for the entire six kilometers between the edge of El Alto and downtown La Paz. Initiated by the recently formed Commission for the Defense of El Alto's Dignity, which brings together FEJUVE (the body that unites around 600 neighborhood committees), COR de El Alto (the Regional Workers Central of El Alto) and El Alto's federation of trade unions, the rally was also joined by the COB (Bolivian Workers Central).

Reaching La Paz, the protesters headed for Plaza Murillo, where the presidential palace is located. Protesters and police clashed and tear gas, rubber bullets and rocks left several injured on both sides.

# Gas Wars Flare Up In Bolivia

**POOREST SOUTH AMERICAN NATION MOVES TO GAIN CONTROL OF ITS VAST NATURAL RESOURCES**

Two days later, 1,000 miners from El Alto along with the COB returned, determined to shut down parliament, as clashes once again ensued. Parliament was suspended and the next sitting date set for May 31, although the venue is uncertain. Meanwhile, numerous road blockades were established along main arterial roads from La Paz, and teachers entered the second day of their three-day strike. On May 20, teachers and university students joined miners and the COB in street protests in La Paz, as El Alto staged a 24-hour general strike.

The powerful Movement Towards Socialism (MAS), led by cocalero (coca farmer) organizer Evo Morales, began a 190km march from Caracollo to La Paz on May 16, aiming to reach the capital by May 23. Under the banner "unity of the Bolivian people for our hydrocarbons, a Constituent Assembly and autonomy for all sectors," the march brought together some 3,000 cocaleros, peasants, indigenous Aymara organizations and workers from trade unions associated with MAS, with many more expected to join.

## FOREIGN INVESTORS LOSE EASY PROFITS

At the heart of the controversy surrounding the new bill is who should control Bolivia's gas reserves — the second largest in South America. Between 1996, when Bolivia's previous gas bill was passed, and 2002, neoliberal presidents Gonzalo Sanchez de Lozada and Jorge Quiroga signed 76 contracts favoring 12 transnationals, including Enron, Shell and British Petroleum. The corporations bought the gas at well below market value and sold it back to Bolivians at 12 times the price.

The bill followed a tumultuous 19 months after a popular uprising ousted president Lozada in October 2003. This "Gas War" between the gas transnationals, the IMF, the World Bank and U.S. and Spanish governments on one side, and Bolivia's poor, indigenous and working-class population on the other, has intensified in the poorest country in South America.

None of the key social forces are happy with the new bill. The gas transnationals and the U.S. government immediately announced their opposition. Even before the final bill was signed, Randal Quarles, the U.S. Treasury Department's assistant secretary of international affairs, was quoted by Reuters on May 7 saying the U.S. was "worried" by the new law that would surely "inhibit foreign investment." Many of the gas transnationals have begun or threatened legal proceedings against the government, regarding the new law as "confiscatory" and illegal as it threatens the profits guaranteed to them under the previous law.

*This article is excerpted from the Green Left Weekly*



## MOBILIZE IN PHILADELPHIA on JUNE 18 - 21 FOR BIODEMOCRACY

The world's largest convention of biotech and pharmaceutical executives is coming to Philly this June. Join thousands to resist their closed-door corporate agenda of GE agriculture, health-care-for-profit, and bioweapons proliferations. Give voice to a different vision of local food sovereignty, fair trade, health care for all, community power, biodiversity and honest science.

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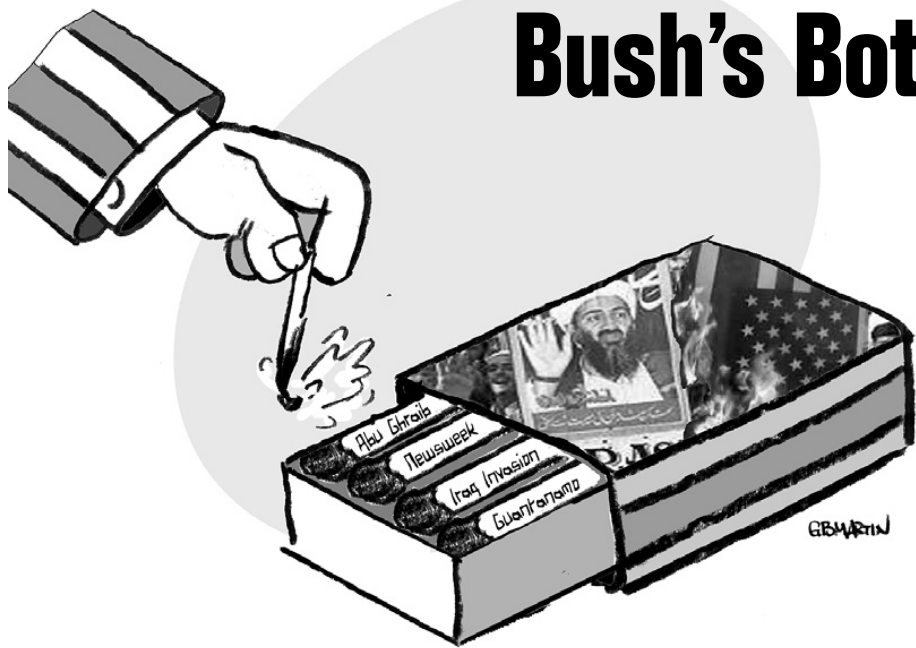
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# Bush's Botched Crusade



BY A.K. GUPTA

Leave it to the Bush administration to fulfill the dream of Islamic holy warriors. It is uniting Muslims across the world in anti-American hatred. The latest grievance is the reports of U.S. prison guards desecrating the Koran at Guantanamo. The White House thought it had flushed the story by getting *Newsweek* to retract it on a technicality, but the controversy prompted a flood of evidence that U.S. forces use desecration of religion as a weapon of war.

The result was days of protest across Afghanistan (half the prisoners in Guantanamo are reported to be Afghani) with 15 people shot dead by U.S.-trained and equipped police forces. The anger quickly spread across the Muslim world, with demonstrations in Palestine, Pakistan and Indonesia.

The *New York Times* came to the shocking conclusion that "Guantanamo comes to define the United States to Muslims." One editor of an English-language paper in Pakistan noted that the prison camp in Cuba is "evidence of how America and the West makes the war against terrorism synonymous with the war against Islam." He added that "The tenor of the debate is acquiring 'civilizational' dimensions."

## COLLIDING CIVILIZATIONS

The idea of two civilizations on a collision course is absurd. The Muslim belt, stretching from northwest Africa to the Pacific Ocean, encompasses hundreds of ethnic and linguistic groups, diverse cultures and myriad interpretations of Islam. But the Bush administration is bringing them together.

There may not be two worlds, but there are two worldviews. Most Americans now

oppose the Iraq War. But appeals to fight terrorism and support-the-troops guilt-tripping effectively mute most criticism. It's not lost on Muslims that U.S. foreign policy in their countries comes down on the side of dictators, repression and occupation, giving new vigor to pan-Islamic protests.

According to the Website *atimes.org*, Islamic movements are planning mass protests for May 27 in 25 countries, including Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia. This is not just a religious struggle. The Koran-in-the-toilet story may have been the spark, but fuel is poured on the Muslim world's discontent daily – whether it's the Western occupations of Palestine and Iraq, regular U.S. bombings in Afghanistan and Pakistan, saber-rattling against Syria and Iran, or torture stories from the Guantanamo franchises around the world. Muslims are also aware of the 13,000 Arabs and South Asians who have been deported from the United States on flimsy grounds since 9/11.

## PR MANEUVERS

In Afghanistan, the protests came after President Hamid Karzai announced on May 8 that he wanted a "strategic partnership" with the United States, meaning that he would roll over to Washington's demands for permanent military bases throughout the country. The protests that started on May 11 quickly took on an anti-occupation tone, with demonstrators burning U.S. flags and demanding that American forces leave Afghanistan (where they have a mini-Guantanamo at the Bagram airbase). Yet when Karzai visited Washington on May 23, the "partnership" was reaffirmed: a relationship that involved Bush rejecting Karzai's plea to turn over Afghans in

Guantanamo, and the Afghani agreeing that the Pentagon would have a free hand to conduct combat operations.

The Bush administration realizes its policies are backfiring, but it can only offer comical PR maneuvers, such as dispatching the First Lady to the Middle East. In Egypt, Laura Bush said Hosni Mubarak's plan to allow an opposition candidate to run against him in September's presidential race was "wise and bold." That may play well in Peoria, but Mubarak is a pharaonic thug who oversees a vicious police state that receives billions in U.S. aid, and observers agree that he has already rigged the contest to ensure his 24-year rule remains untouched. (Egypt is also one of the many countries where the United States practices "rendition": shipping detainees there so they can be held and tortured in secret.)

Nor did it escape many that the May 12-13 bloodbath in Uzbekistan, in which hundreds of people were slaughtered, was perpetrated by Islam Karimov, another strongman propped up by Washington. Karimov oversees a nepotistic regime of terror that runs a mini-Guantanamo where prison conditions include rape, slave labor and being boiled alive. His nation also hosts a large U.S. military base. He is also notorious for brutally suppressing practicing Muslims, even those who are nonpolitical. According to many human-rights groups, having a long beard in Uzbekistan is enough to be disappeared and tortured to death.

The epicenter for the conflict is the Middle East, of course, which plays into 2,000 years of Christian end-times prophesying. Syria has announced it will no longer do dirty work in the "war on terror," whether that's supplying information or graciously offering to torture U.S. detainees. Then there is the ever-present bone in the Muslim (and Arab) throat: the Israeli occupation. Finding a new Palestinian to police the occupation has pushed the struggle out of the Western eye, but media in the Islamic world still show the apartheid wall being built, the land grabs occurring, and the economy and people being strangled by an Israeli-enforced humanitarian disaster.

The U.S. appears headed for a showdown with Iran, but it has few military or diplomatic options. Its ground troops are indefinitely bogged down in Iraq, and bringing painful sanctions to bear on Iran, such as stopping the export of hydrocarbons, would only cause the global economy to crash.

Four years into the war on terror, the Bush administration is locked into a strategy that brooks no retreat. While we are a long way from the devastation that marked the wars of the last century, we are on the same path.

# IN BRIEF

## WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE. . .

Human rights groups are calling on the Bush administration to stop supporting the government of Uzbekistan after Uzbek soldiers shot dead over 600 civilian demonstrators on May 22. The Bush administration took days to respond to the slaughter – which has been widely compared to the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre in China.

Meanwhile the Los Angeles Times recently revealed another dark secret of the Bush administration – the CIA has restored ties to Sudan. The CIA recently flew the Sudanese chief of intelligence to Washington for secret talks even though the same official has been accused by members of Congress of directing military attacks against civilians in Darfur.

And a new report by the World Institute Policy has found that in 2003 more than half of the top 25 recipients of U.S. arms transfers in the developing world were defined as undemocratic by the State Department. Recipients include Saudi Arabia (\$1.1 billion), Egypt (\$1 billion), Kuwait (\$153 million), the United Arab Emirates (\$110 million) and Uzbekistan (\$33 million).

## EVER WONDERED WHY BIG MEDIA IGNORES GLOBAL WARMING?

Oil giant British Petroleum has informed all newspapers and magazines that it will pull its advertising from any issue that contains "objectionable editorial coverage." In addition, AdAge reports, BP wants advanced notification anytime publications plan to publish a news item that directly mentions BP, a competitor or the oil-and-energy industry. One veteran of the magazine industry told AdAge, "magazines are not in the financial position today to buck rules from advertisers."

## PROTESTING HALLIBURTON

In Houston, police arrested 16 people during protests outside Halliburton's annual shareholders meeting on May 18. Inside the meeting – which was off limits to the press – shareholders were likely rejoicing. Although the company is being investigated for its work in Nigeria, Iran, Iraq, and the Balkans, government contracts keep coming. CorpWatch reports Halliburton pulled in over \$7 billion in revenue for its recent work in Iraq – double the figure from the previous year. Outside the meeting, police on horseback rode into the peaceful crowds, swung batons and made a series of arrests. Several protesters – as well as one police officer – reported injuries.



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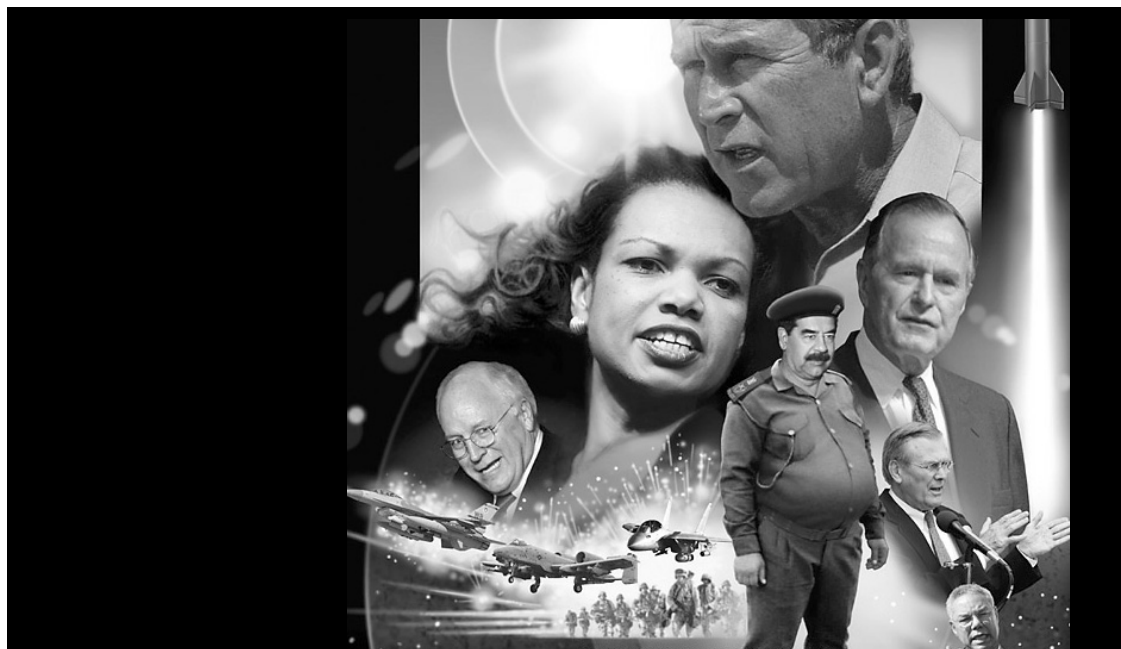
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# Imperial Commander-in-Chief



BY NICHOLAS POWERS

Are we becoming our movies? In a recent interview, George Lucas said he wrote *Star Wars* as an allegory of the Vietnam War, adding that “the parallels between what we did in Vietnam and what we’re doing in Iraq now are unbelievable.”

In *Star Wars: Episode 3*, Anakin Skywalker stands in for President Bush, a man tempted by power to give up his humanity. His real body is replaced, limb by limb, with machine parts so that when the black mask descends he is transformed into an apparatus of the Evil Empire. What little bipartisanship and will to compromise George W. Bush retained as he entered the White House was soon

“Anakin fears for his wife and believes the Emperor can save her and pledges himself to his new master. Bush, afraid for his soul after years of alcoholism, believes in God to save him, and pledges himself to his new religion.”

eclipsed by a heavy myopic mask of a crusader.

The drama here is the fall of men, hailed by a voice impossible to deny. If Louis Althusser, a Marxist philosopher, was in the audience, he might laugh at the resemblance between this drama and his own theory of ideological interpolation. In it he says that social control is maintained not by violence but by ideology, the calling out to an individual who hears not just the call

but the promise of being, Althusser asserts that an inevitable split exists in each of us. Between whom we think we are, who we want to be and what we are afraid to become. In times of crisis these splits widen and threaten to collapse our identity. Ideology seals these splits. Anakin fears for his wife and believes the Emperor can save her and pledges himself to his new master. Bush, afraid for his soul after years of alcoholism,

believes in God to save him, and pledges himself to his new religion. After 9/11, he turned to this divine voice again. It soothes doubt by giving him firm directions, evidenced by his 2003 State of the Union address, where he said, “The liberty we prize is not America’s gift to the world, it is God’s gift to humanity.”

The pleasure of believing in a larger cause is that one can sacrifice others without questioning if the claims of the cause are real. Darth Vader’s appeal stems from his unblinking cruelty – a twist of his gloved hand and the necks of incompetent officers snap.

Power becomes evil when it takes pleasure in itself, denies itself nothing. Enter President Bush. His conservative base is not conservative when it comes to waging war in the name of security. Voters who identify with him imagine themselves striding across the earth, gun in hand, to reclaim the world their fathers won for them, a world that was slipping back into the hands of the wretched of the earth.

This obsession with security fosters paranoid isolation. We need not respond to the world, only to God. Freud wrote, “What is characteristic of illusions is that they are derived from human wishes.” The benefit of the illusion of God is that we can have our wishes fulfilled without having to be held accountable for them.

It is this desire for power without responsibility that drives military experiments. Just as the *Star Wars* prequel opens, in timing that is more than mere chance, the Air Force has asked Congress to fund our first Death Star. Science fiction is becoming fact. The program, Global Strike, is a space-weapons system of satellites circling the earth, loaded with missiles that can hit cities with the force of a small nuclear weapon or use lasers to fry men to ash.

Why does our military need to dominate space? The usual answer is we must protect our nation from enemies. Yet what if our enemy is not rogue states or rising powers like China or India, but our own pride? Is that what is at stake, our privilege to represent Divine Will? Is that why one of the satellites is named “Rods from God”?

In contrast to our Biblical morality, we should balance a Greek myth. A court aide named Damocles flattered the tyrant Dionysius incessantly, until the emperor, tired of it, gave the aide a day in his life. After enjoying food, women and power all day, he lay in the king’s bed and was startled to see above him a sword held by a thin hair. He realized the lesson. Power is dangerous, both to those who wield it and to those in fear of it. Our Air Force has asked Congress for the money to build a sword in space. They believe the heavier the sword, the easier it is to wield.

## Second to Nun

SON OF NUN

BLOOD AND FIRE

MORNING LIGHT RECORDS

What happened to political hip-hop? Those of us old enough to assign meaning to the words “Native Tongues” grew up during an era when spitting meaningful lyrics didn’t mean you were flushing commercial viability down the toilet. Uh, so things have changed a little. The major labels may have Dead Prez, but for the most part it has fallen to underground MCs like Baltimore’s Son of Nun to carry the torch lit by the socially conscious artists of the ‘80s.

S.O.N.’s freshman full-length effort, *Blood and Fire* (Morning Light), unabashedly places the politics of the left front and center. The Charm City MC (a.k.a. Kevin James) laces his lyrical content with the seriousness of issues like the U.S.’s firmly antidemocratic Haitian foreign policy and the injustices of globalization, all while keeping it illy for heads and maintaining a sense of humor about himself.

S.O.N. brings the battle-ready mentality of real hip-hop to the social-justice movement, recontextualizing mainstay rap references about slinging rocks on tracks like “Free Palestine,” where he assumes the identity of a Palestinian, rhyming, “It’s hard to fathom but even harder to manage/I’m a second-class citizen in the land of my origin.”

[www.sonofnun.net](http://www.sonofnun.net)

[www.morninglightrecords.com](http://www.morninglightrecords.com)

— RAHUL CHADHA

PHOTO: ANDY LAKEN



## OUTRIGHT BADASSNESS

SLEATER-KINNEY

THE WOODS

SUB POP RECORDS

[WWW.SLEATER-KINNEY.COM](http://WWW.SLEATER-KINNEY.COM)

[WWW.SUBPOP.COM](http://WWW.SUBPOP.COM)

Sleater-Kinney’s *The Woods*, produced by Dave Fridmann, is the band’s first album in three years and their noisiest one yet.

The group of Carrie Brownstein, Corin Tucker, and Janet Weiss has forged a departure from their prior records on the Kill Rock Stars label. The Northwest band was formed in 1994 during the riot-grrl movement. *The Woods*, on Sub Pop, has Hendrix-like guitar solos and Zeppelin-inspired jams bridging its songs and lyrics.

Brownstein’s guitar heroics reach outright badassness. Tucker’s voice vibrates throughout and threatens to break apart as it overwhelms, and Weiss’s drumming gets more kinetic, with her arms whirling about her kit. She also plays harmonica on “Modern Girl.”

Midway into the album is “Jumpers,” a slow ballad about falling from the Golden Gate Bridge, sad and beautiful with a crunchy organ-like guitar and the lyrics, “My falling shape will draw a line/Between the

blue of sea and sky.”

“So you want to be entertained? All you want is entertainment. Rip me open, it’s free.” Those lyrics open “Entertain,” the record’s most danceable song, in which Weiss provides a steady rock beat during a “whuh-oh-oh” refrain and “1-2-3” chorus.

Tucker sings “Rollercoaster,” the yummiest and most colorful of the tunes here, her cheeky voice serving up food obsession and relationships in a stew of rock and tomatoes – “Down at the market pick out the ripe one/Tempting me sorely and I want to bite one.”

The 11-minute “Let’s Call It Love” is the song which comes closest to capturing Sleater-Kinney’s live shows. A jam that causes synapses to fire and psychedelic colors to emerge, it leaves the listener traveling in their own tunnel of love. “Night Light,” which emerges from it, is beautifully sung by Tucker, a cool-down from the guitar peaks and the heights the album has achieved.

—XAVIER TAYO



IMMACULATE PERCEPTION

DIRECTED BY MARIO PINZON  
(19 MINUTES)  
3RD EYE PRODUCTIONS

Unlike her Biblical namesake, 16-year-old Maria – a Latina immigrant to Queens – is certifiably not a virgin. *Immaculate Perception* is a short poetic film that explores the all-too-common, but profound, conundrum facing young women who find themselves pregnant. Director Mario Pinzon edits dreamlike cadences with a powerful grasp of color, texture and the semiotics of innocence.

The viewer joins Maria in the liminal ground between the miraculous ecstasy of an expectant mother and the horror of the shame and exile brought upon her by her unwed status. Maria's inability or unwillingness to deal with love and sex as a sin manifests through her total denial of having had sex. This

is a difficult point to grasp in the film's plot, especially as she tries to convince her handsome boyfriend, Jose, that she has had an immaculate conception. "Then who?" he asks her. "No one, I don't know," she answers, and it's left at that.

The filmmaker defines Maria's innocence cinematographically, silhouetting her long hair and Catholic schoolgirl's uniform against rough graffitied concrete. She shares this uniform with her younger sister, but shares her full lips and beauty with her voluptuous and pregnant cousin. The images of white doves and white lilies are easy, unchallenging metaphors, but Pinzon uses them in a noble effort to tell the story emotionally and nonverbally rather than clinically.

*The opening reception, with live Colombian music, will take place on Friday, June 3 at 8 p.m. at Terraza Cafe Art, 40-19 Gleane St. Elmhurst, Queens; (718) 803-9602; www.terrazacafe.com. Admission is free.*

—AMY WOLF

# notes from the underground press

BY A.K. GUPTA

Depending on who's counting, there are hundreds or even thousands of "alternative" English-language periodicals. Many are dense academic journals that require an advanced degree just to unpack. But hundreds are popular or general interest publications worthy of a wide audience. This is the first installment of a new column highlighting some of the more intriguing offerings.

BITCHFEST

Self-tagged as "Feminist response to pop culture," *Bitch* is always a fun read. A quarterly, its latest issue is devoted to masculinity, featuring articles on "Dude Tube," a look at Spike TV, an amusing photo spread on the evolution of chest hair in pop-culture icons and an intelligent look at the "new assault on black male sexuality." My favorite piece was an analysis of *Spongebob Squarepants: The Movie*. Ricocheting from the notion of male stupidity as "a new form of machismo" (George W.) and the men of *Sideways* as older "versions of the hapless losers who have always populated teen comedies," author Martha Rich argues that Spongebob presents "a softer, more absorbent masculinity."

THE DOWNING STREET MEMO

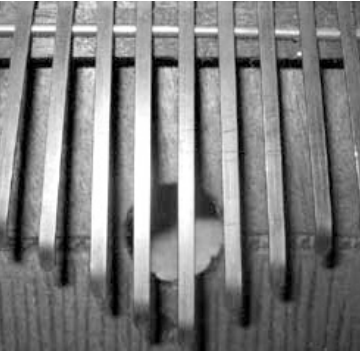
Okay, *The New York Review of Books* hardly qualifies as underground, but it is one of my favorite publications and, sadly, unread by most radicals. It reprints in the June 9 issue the complete text of the "Secret Downing Street Memo" – the one that proves the Bush administration was hellbent on invading Iraq and was "fixing" the facts and intelligence around the policy. The memo is accompanied by a trenchant analysis by Mark Danner, author of *Torture and Truth: America, Abu Ghraib and the War on Terror*, who argues convincingly that the failure of U.N. inspectors to find (nonexistent) weapons of mass destruction allowed the White House to discredit the inspections process and push for war.

\$SPREAD OUTCALLS TO A NEWSSTAND NEAR YOU

The premiere issue of *\$pread*, a quarterly devoted to "illuminating the sex industry" has just hit the newsstands. Most of the content is first person, and its editorial stance is clearly in favor of decriminalization. *\$pread* takes a largely upbeat view of the "industry," with only a few articles touching on the ever-present dangers of violence, STDs and pimps. It also sidesteps the pressure placed on strippers to move into prostitution. Though *\$pread* should be lauded for trying to put a human face on sex workers, and it does tackle the issue of trafficking, it's bothersome, but not surprising, that many articles talk about the money to be made in the trade – it is a magazine about sex workers after all. While the first issue is rough, with numerous copy errors and blurry/dark photographs, *\$pread* is worth keeping an eye on.

## African Organic Techno

BY STEVEN WISHNIA



African drumming and electronica occupy opposite ends of the technological spectrum. African drumming is the oldest music and audio technology on the planet, the sound of bare hands slapping goatskin, amplified by rough-hewn wood. Electronica would not exist without the microprocessor, pulsates at the clock speed of computer chips, and surrounds itself with futuristic machine metaphors. Yet they share an uncanny structural similarity. Both rely on intensive repetition, growing their grooves out of a mesh of simple interlocking patterns, shading into different moods without breaking the beat.

If you want to hear the two musics fused – probably unintentionally – you should check out Konono No. 1's *Congotronics* (Crammed Discs): Three crudely amplified

### the A-string

kalimbas (also called likembes or sanzans – they're southern African thumb pianos, tuned metal tines mounted on a board or wooden box) and metal-jam percussion, from agogo bells to hubcaps. If you can imagine African organic techno, that's what it sounds like: repetitive, hypnotic, overwhelming, but the crackling-synapse arpeggios come from thumbs instead of sequencers.

Originally from the Congo-Angola borderlands, Konono No. 1 has been performing for years in and around Kinshasa, the Congo's capital. Here, they take the trance music of the Bazombo people and amplify the kalimbas with microphones built from wood and salvaged car-part magnets, adding an edge of distortion to the bell-like tones. The lead kalimbas sit atop a bed of chattering percus-

sion and chanted vocals, sometimes setting the groove with three-note licks, sometimes dancing around it, and then the bassline drops in, carrying you away on the wave of sound.


*Congotronics* won't be for everyone's taste. It's got nothing resembling Western song structure, and the melodies are minimal. But to my ears, it's the most amazingly distinctive music I've heard in the last few years. The moment where the bass kalimba returns on "Masikulu" is perfect.

ST. LOUIS BLUES

St. Louis has a rich musical history: Miles Davis started out there, and in the '50s and '60s, Chuck Berry, Ike and Tina Turner, and Oliver Sain vied to be the area's top R&B act. Sain, a saxophonist who died in 2003, is virtually unknown outside St. Louis, but he was a mainstay of its music scene. He scored minor funk hits in the '70s with tunes titled "Party Hearty" and "Booty Bumpin'" (find these and some beautiful slow jams on his *St. Louis Breakdown* collection), and he also produced Fontella Bass' 1965 soul hit "Rescue Me," records by free-

jazz players Hamiet Blueitt and Julius Hemphill, and the 1988 comeback CD by Berry's pianist, Johnnie Johnson.

The residue of all this is a strong blues-bar scene, and going to the media-reform conference gave me a chance to check it out. The material isn't always original (is there some liquor-license rule that requires bar-blues bands to do "Mustang Sally?"), but the basslines are fat and the rhythms rock-solid. One night found us watching bands and DJs playing amid the gonzo metal sculptures of an abandoned shoe factory turned art museum. Similar things happened a lot in pre-gentrification '80s New York, but this was a lot less self-consciously arty and nihilistic. As Gumbohead thumped out "Hey Pocky A-Way," a dozen people paraded onto the dance floor, opening and closing lawn chairs (not quite in time to the music). Fontella Bass played the next night, and the one after that we caught bluesman Arthur Williams, cawing the harmonica and sporting a silver sharkskin suit. I danced until my shirt dripped sweat. How often do you get to do that to live music in New York?



VOXPOP.NET

BOOKS, COFFEE, DEMOCRACY

THURS JUNE 2 • 7pm • Free!

First-time U.S. showing of footage from the 2001 CHILDREN OF ABRAHAM PEACE WALK by the Voices of America

SAT JUNE 4 • 8pm

Singer-songwriter Alan Semerdjian

TUES JUNE 7 • 7pm

Free instabook with a \$5 cover David Enders reads from his book *Baghdad Bulletin*, a street-level account of the Iraq war.

WED JUNE 8 • 7pm

THANK YOU VOX POP-ERS EVENT

Free soup, bread, coffee, and frank exchange of ideas

THURS JUNE 9 • 7pm

STORYTELLING BY WOMEN OF A CERTAIN AGE

Women of all faiths discuss their experiences in Palestine

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BROOKLYN



Launching meeting

THURSDAY, JUNE 9

7:00 PM

Help build the next generation of progressive activists and journalists. Come to the first meeting to plan the launch of a new progressive current events magazine for children!

All are welcome.


INDYMEDIA OFFICE

34 E. 29TH STREET

2ND FLOOR

(BETWEEN PARK AND MADISON AVES.)

SUBWAY: 6 TO 28TH ST.



THE INDEPENDENT MAY 25 – JUNE 14, 2005 11

## THE INDYPENDENT

has open meetings every Tuesday at  
7p.m. at 34 E. 29th St., 2nd floor.

### SAT MAY 28



12pm – 12am • FREE  
10TH ANNUAL FESTIVAL OF THE ARTS LES  
FILM FESTIVAL including Jim Jarmusch's  
COFFEE AND CIGARETTES (2004), a revival  
of Richard Crawford's CAPTAIN MILKSHAKE  
(1969), short docs, features, and clever  
animations.  
In the Cabaret space at Theater for The New City  
155 First Ave. (between 9th and 10th St.s)

6pm • Free  
TIMES UP LADIES' BICYCLE REPAIR NIGHT  
49 E. Houston St. (between Mott and Mulberry)

### SUN MAY 29

1pm • FREE  
MEMORIAL DAY COMMEMORATION FOR PEACE  
NYC Vietnam Veterans Memorial  
(sunken plaza between Broad St. & William St. &  
East River/FDR Drive) just south of 55 Water  
Street, just north of 4 New York Plaza  
212-726-0557

2pm • \$5  
WALKING TOUR: SURVEILLANCE CAMERA  
TOUR, LOWER EAST SIDE.  
Meet at NE corner Houston & Ave D  
Sponsor: NY Surveillance Camera Players.  
Info: 212-561-0106, SCP@notbored.org

10pm • \$5  
BOOKS THROUGH BARS,  
POETRY READINGS, Jennifer Blowdryer,  
W/John S Hall, Sasha Forte (of King Missile  
111), Joie Blaney & Just About to Burn.  
Bowery Poetry Club, 308 Bowery  
(1st St. btw Houston & Bleecker)

### WED JUNE 1

7pm & 9:30pm • \$10  
MEDIA THAT MATTERS FILM FESTIVAL @  
BAM CINÉMATEK  
Brooklyn Academy of Music  
30 Lafayette Avenue  
(between Ashland Place and St. Felix Street)  
Brooklyn, www.bam.org, www.mediathatmatters.org

7:30pm • Suggested donation: \$6 / \$10 / \$15  
VIDEO SCREENINGS & DISCUSSION with  
filmmakers "Fallujah" & "The World Tribunal  
on Iraq" The first is a film edited primarily  
from footage shot by the Iraqi people of  
Fallujah, the second film is the finale to  
Deep Dish TVs award-winning "Shocking &  
Awful" series.  
Brecht Forum, 451 West St.

### THURS JUNE 2

8pm • FREE  
TIME'S UP! FILM SCREENING OF *THE  
CORPORATION* (2004) An entertaining cri-  
tique of global conglomerates, their inner  
workings, controversial impacts and possi-  
ble futures.  
49 E. Houston St. (between Mott and Mulberry).

### FRI JUNE 3

8pm • FREE  
SCREENING AND FILM RELEASE PARTY FOR  
*IMMACULATE PERCEPTION* (see review on  
page 11)  
Terraza Cafe Art, 40-19 Gleane St,  
Elmhurst, Queens. www.terrazacafe.com

6:30pm • \$5-\$10, no one turned away  
PREMIERE OF *MISSION AGAINST TERROR*  
A film about different definitions of terrorism  
and why terrorists proven to carry out bomb-  
ings and attacks against the Cuban island are  
allowed to walk the streets of Miami freely.  
Sponsored by Education Project To Free the Cuban 5  
Riverside Church 91 Claremont Ave.  
btw. 120 – 122 Sts.

### SAT JUNE 4

2 – 5pm • FREE  
FIRST SATURDAYS BICYCLE WORKSHOP &  
"AFTER PARTY", 11:30pm – garden  
camp fire! • East New York Green Tea House  
300 Logan Street Brooklyn 646-549-1615

# COMMUNITY CALENDAR

## MAY/JUNE

2pm • FREE  
THE NEW PROFILING: RACISM,  
REPRESSION, LOSS OF RIGHTS.  
a discussion with Lynne Stewart and Adem  
Carroll. Childcare Provided.  
St. Francis of Assisi Church, Lincoln Rd. and  
Nostrand Ave., #2 to Sterling St. stop in BKLN

12pm-7pm • FREE  
OPEN AIR ART EXHIBITION  
Featuring artists who live or work in El  
Barrio, including James de la Vega, Miguel  
Trelles, and many others.  
East 106 Between Lexington and Third Aves.  
www.east-harlem.com

### SUN JUNE 5

2pm • \$7  
A TRIBUTE TO EL BARRIO POET PEDRO  
PIETRI, veteran and emerging poets from  
the famed Nuyorican Poets Café in  
Loisaida bring the poetry uptown to El  
Barrio.  
1220 Fifth Ave. East Harlem 212-534-1672

4 – 5pm • \$10  
YERBABUENA BORICUA AND LATINO MUSI-  
CIANS, SINGERS, AND DANCERS IN THE  
MUSICAL TRADITIONS OF PUERTO RICO  
AND THE CARIBBEAN.  
1220 Fifth Avenue East Harlem

### TUE JUNE 7

6-9pm • FREE  
MUSEUM MILE FESTIVAL 2005  
Fifth Ave. is closed to cars from 82nd St.  
to 105th St., and becomes home to a  
block party, music, art, free access to the  
nine museums located along Museum Mile.

7pm • FREE  
GREENSPEAKERS/TOASTMASTERS  
PUBLIC SPEAKING WORKSHOP  
Two Hour public speaking and leadership  
workshops. All progressive activists are  
welcome to attend. RSVP required!  
4 Irving Place  
http://www.greenspeakers.org

### THU JUNE 9

8pm • FREE  
TIME'S UP! FILM SCREENING  
of *The End of Suburbia: Oil Depletion and  
the Collapse of the American Dream* (2004)  
49 E. Houston St. (between Mott and Mulberry).

7pm • FREE  
STORYTELLING BY WOMEN OF A CERTAIN AGE  
Women of all faiths discuss their experiences in  
Palestine.  
Vox Pop 1022 Cortelyou Rd. Brooklyn

### FRI JUNE 10

7pm • FREE  
CRITICAL MASS: BROOKLYN  
Grand Army Plaza, Brooklyn

## ONGOING

### MAY 28 - JUNE 19

TUESDAY - SATURDAY AT 8PM  
SATURDAY AND SUNDAY AT 4PM  
Tickets are \$25-\$45 (Student Rush:  
\$20 w/ valid ID - 1 per ID)  
A SINGLE WOMAN  
The play is an exploration of the life of  
Jeannette Rankin who voted against US  
entry into both world wars as a representa-  
tive in Congress in 1917, before Suffrage,  
and again in 1941 when hers was the lone  
dissenting.  
Call 775-324-4198  
The Culture Project 45 Bleecker St. New York NY  
www.nevada-shakespeare.org

E-mail events to:  
[indymediaevents@yahoo.com](mailto:indymediaevents@yahoo.com)



Jeannette Rankin

# DO YOU THINK YOU SHOULD BE PAYING MORE RENT?

## MET COUNCIL ON HOUSING WANTS TO KNOW.

Because you may be paying a lot more rent...  
unless you show up at the Rent Guidelines Board Public Hearings:

### BROOKLYN PUBLIC HEARING

#### TUESDAY, JUNE 14

4 – 10 pm  
NYC College of Technology, Kiltgord Auditorium  
285 Jay St., Brooklyn

### MANHATTAN PUBLIC HEARING

#### THURSDAY, JUNE 16

10 am to 6 pm  
Cooper Union (Great Hall in basement)  
7 East 7th St. (corner of 3rd Ave.)

Met Council – fighting to keep rent stabilization  
in place and prevent unwarranted rent hikes for more than 50 years.

## FINAL VOTE • TUESDAY, JUNE 21 5:30 pm

Cooper Union, 7 East 7th St. & 3rd Ave.

For more information, call Met Council on Housing, (212) 979-6238, ext 3.  
or e-mail: [active@metcouncil.net](mailto:active@metcouncil.net) or visit our website at [www.metcouncil.net](http://www.metcouncil.net)  
For tenant questions call M, W, F 212-979-0611.